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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004152

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2016
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SUBJECT: AMAR AL-HAKIM ON IRAQ-GCC AND IRAQ-KUWAIT RELATIONS
REF: KUWAIT 4076

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Amar Al-Hakim, son of SCIRI leader Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim, said the annual Ramadan visit of the Al-Hakim family is a social tradition and an opportunity to reach out to Kuwait's government and the Sunni community here. During his visit, Al-Hakim met with a wide range of senior officials and visited as many as 80 Diwanyyas (traditional Kuwaiti gatherings). Al-Hakim was pleased with his reception, but said the rest of the GCC presents a more difficult challenge. He cited biased Gulf satellite news broadcasts and a failure to come to terms with the new political reality in Iraq. Al-Hakim said he received assurances during his visit from the Kuwait FM that Kuwait will send an Ambassador to Baghdad when Iraq names an Ambassador to Kuwait. End Summary.

¶2. (C) PolCouns met October 12 with Amar Al-Hakim, son of SCIRI leader Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, and head of the Shahid al-Mehrab Foundation. Al-Hakim was in Kuwait as the family representative for what has become an annual Ramadan visit. He was received by the Amir and other senior-level Kuwaiti officials (reftel), both publicly and in private audiences (as he departed a morning meeting with PolCouns, he said he was off for a viewing of Kuwaiti PM Shaykh Nasser's private art and antiquities collection).

¶3. (C) While some Kuwaiti observers describe the Al-Hakim family's annual visits as primarily a fund-raising opportunity among Kuwait's wealthy Shia community, Al-Hakim's schedule read more like a political campaign. Exploiting a Kuwaiti tradition during Ramadan, Al-Hakim claims to have visited 80 Diwaniyyas over a four-day visit, representing the range of communities and political views in Kuwait. He took pains to note that he even tried to visit the Diwaniyya of (anti-Shia Salafi MP) Waleed al-Tabtabaie. In a separate meeting with PolCouns, Islamic Constitutional Movement (Affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood) MP Nasser al-Sane said he was surprised (but pleased) when Al-Hakim showed up at his Diwaniyya as well.

¶4. (C) Al-Hakim told PolCouns that his visit was both a Ramadan tradition and part of a larger outreach effort aimed at both Kuwaitis and other GCC countries. He was pleased with the reception he gets in Kuwait, but complained that he is a long way from getting a similar welcome in other GCC countries. "The Kuwaitis understand us," he said, "while the rest of the region has not changed its old attitudes." He said the major obstacles to better understanding include what he considers the biased and inflammatory reporting of Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiyya, and other satellite TV outlets, and a failure to come to terms with the new political reality in Iraq. The Gulf Arabs, he said, complain about where we look for support, while they "forget to consider that maybe we walk through the only door that is open." The solution, according to Al-Hakim, is more pressure from the United States on GCC governments to rein in the satellite stations

and to engage Iraq's Shia community. "They have to realize we are Arabs," he insisted. When pressed, Al-Hakim conceded that a greater Iraqi outreach effort along the lines of his own visit would also help.

15. (C) Pressed on Kuwait-Iraq relations, Al-Hakim said Kuwaiti FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah assured him during their meeting that when Iraq names an Ambassador, Kuwait will immediately follow suit, and the FM himself will travel to Baghdad. Asked why Iraq had not been able to name an Ambassador, Al-Hakim shrugged and said "there are some problems." (Note: Kuwait's semi-official Ambassador-designate, retired General Ali Al-Mumin, plans to visit Iraq next month in his capacity as head of the Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) End note).
Tueller